

Ya.O. Udintseva, E.M. Bozhko

Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin

Yekaterinburg, Russia

PROBLEMS OF LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN BIG GROUPS

Abstract: This article examines the essence and the causes of problems that arise during the process of learning a foreign language in general, as well as the problems of learning a foreign language in big groups. Description is given of the possible reasons, due to which people usually cannot succeed in learning foreign languages, and the potential ways to overcome them. Afterwards the article goes on to discuss the problems of learning foreign languages in big groups, as it often happens nowadays in various linguistic centers and universities and offers possible ways of solving the problems described both for the learners and for the teacher.

Keywords: foreign language learning, problems of foreign language learning, group learning, learning a foreign language in big groups.

Я.О. Удинцева, Е.М. Божко

Уральский федеральный университет имени первого Президента России Б.Н. Ельцина

Екатеринбург, Россия

ПРОБЛЕМЫ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА В БОЛЬШИХ ГРУППАХ

Аннотация: В данной статье исследуются суть и причины появления проблем, возникающих при изучении иностранного языка в целом, а также проблемы изучения иностранного языка в больших

группах. Описываются возможные причины, по которым люди обычно не могут выучить иностранный язык, и потенциальные способы борьбы с этими причинами. Далее в статье описываются проблемы изучения иностранного языка в больших группах, как это зачастую происходит сейчас в различных лингвистических центрах и в университетах, и предлагаются возможные пути решения данной проблемы, как для учителя, так и для обучающихся.

Ключевые слова: изучение иностранного языка, проблемы изучения иностранного языка, групповое обучение, изучение иностранного языка в больших группах.

Language is the historical system of sound, vocabulary and grammatical means that objectifies the work of thinking and is a tool for communication, the exchange of thoughts and mutual understanding of people in the community [1]. When it comes to a foreign language, for most people the definition comes down to something like «too difficult to learn». People very often give up at the very beginning, without even trying to learn more about a particular language. Giving up is always easy. There are millions of excuses to stop learning a foreign language or not to start learning it at all.

As it is well known, an excuse is the conviction of oneself or others in the existence of an insurmountable obstacle to the accomplishment of a particular task. Without bringing the matter to the end, many people prefer to justify it with a number of reasons, which are not always real, but perfectly fulfill their basic function – they relieve a person from remorse and allow to forget about the things not done. The most popular excuses are: «I have no time for that», «it does not work», «I don't have talent», «it is not that necessary», «I don't have enough money», «I can do it later», «I doubt myself», «I have really bad memory and cannot remember many things» or «I have been learning the language for a long time, but still do not know it».

However, there are many real problems while learning a foreign language, which prevent many people from the learning process. Some of these problems are the following:

1. Lack of motivation

For most people, the main problem in learning anything is, of course, the lack of desire, which is the core of motivation. If a person is truly motivated, they can cope with any task without looking for excuses. When a person believes that knowing at least one foreign language is necessary in the modern world and begins to learn it just because it is necessary and just «because everybody does», they rarely succeed. However, motivation works only if:

- a person really wants to do something;
- a person does not have a choice;
- a person knows how to motivate themselves and do something, even if there is no need or lack of desire.

2. Language barrier

A native speaker typically does not reduce the speed of their speech speaking with their usual tempo. Such speech is not simplified or adapted for a foreigner, so at first it is very difficult to understand the speakers of the language you are studying, and this can become a sufficient reason for demotivation.

3. Lack of practice

Practice has always played a leading role in learning any foreign language because every language has its own rules and its own peculiarities, which are to be practiced in speaking. The more often you speak the foreign language you study, the less alien and unusual it will seem to you. Unfortunately, nowadays there are certain cases when learning comes nothing but grammar and translation, and this can be the reason people do not achieve the results they desire when learning foreign languages, and their typical wish is to be able to easily communicate in a foreign language.

4. Fear of making mistakes

All people are different. Someone can easily speak in public, others prefer to sit quietly. These people carefully think about what and when to say and feel shy to give a voice. This fear of making a mistake or of seeming stupid literally paralyzes them and prevents from participating in the process of learning.

5. Learning is nothing but cramming

Those people who think so are mistaken. It is just necessary to learn words and cram the rules only at the initial stage, and afterwards it is necessary to practice them, and to speak as much as possible.

6. Lack of opportunities

No matter how much you want to learn a language, not everyone has such an opportunity. Someone does not have money for extra courses; someone does not have time to attend classes. For those who cannot learn the language themselves, regular optional classes with a tutor (with doing and checking homework, of course) are the best option.

7. Native language interference (missing the fact languages are different)

Each person is used to the features of their language. While studying a foreign language, everyone still tries to understand and explain it through their own language. When translating from a native language to a foreign one, you are just tempted to translate word by word, in the same order as it is in your native language [2].

8. Lack of listening skills

Without listening exercises, you will not be able to understand what people say in a language you study.

9. Differences between languages

A lot of questions arise while learning a foreign language when we find something in it that we do not have in our own language. This phenomenon may be really difficult and discouraging for the learner.

10. Lack of fixation (forgetting curve)

Revising the material is the second most important process after practice in the learning process. Learning words is not enough, you need to know when and how to use them in speech, otherwise the material will not be kept in memory and will just disappear soon. The term «the curve of forgetting» introduced in 1885 by the German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus implies that you need to revise the material several times at fixed intervals in order to truly learn it [3].

11. Fatigue

Since the process of studying is very long, desire can fade away sooner or later even with a great love to the language.

Foreign languages are not always studied individually. Studying can take place in big groups. Until now, no consensus has been reached about whether to learn a language in a group or not. For someone it is easier to learn the language alone and for someone it is better to do it in a group. But there are also some problems that may appear in the process of studying. Here are some of them, and the possible ways to cope with them.

First of all, it is the lack of individual approach. There is not enough time to test the knowledge of every student in big groups. If someone does

not understand the material, it may be unnoticed for a long time, especially if the programme is being mastered at an accelerated pace. There are a lot of students in the classroom, and all of them learn the subject differently. The possible solution to this problem will be to find an individual approach that will take into account the student's strengths and weaknesses.

Second, it is fear to seem silly. We have already mentioned that. It is not always easy to express your opinion when you are not sure about something, especially when it comes to classes in a big group of students. No one wants to seem stupid, giving the wrong answer or saying the wrong word. So, many people prefer to remain silent if they are not sure about the answer. They are just waiting for the others to answer. And it is worth mentioning that unfortunately, such a habit has been developed in the learners since their time at school.

The next problem is time limits. The process of learning a language may be limited by the time, which is no help for students. The programme has a lot of information, and little time to study it thoroughly. One topic is quickly changed by another, and none of them is properly anchored. The possible solution thereto is to use additional resources for studying, and the teacher should be well aware of such and recommend them to the students.

Relationships within a group are also important as a human is a social being. If the atmosphere in the group is unfavorable, it will affect the person's desire to study. The relationships in a group should help to be active or, at least, should not interfere with the learning process. It is a responsibility of a teacher to know the psychological climate in a certain group and to be able to influence it.

The next problem is related to the Russian proverb «seven do not wait for one». The whole group will not wait for one person to understand. It always needs to move on. So, there are always people in the group who tend to lag behind as they did not have enough time to digest the information they are presented, and to master it properly. Again, the solution may lie in using additional resources for studying a foreign language, including the Internet resources and different mobile applications.

Sometimes even if the programme is too intensive or is not suitable for all students, nothing can be done with it because it is necessary to follow the planned programme stages. The programme cannot be adapted for everyone, but the process of learning and memorizing is different for everyone. Sometimes a person wants to learn a language but a programme

or a teacher may not suit them. It may be difficult for someone to stay in a certain team, but there is no possibility to change it for another. Thus, one has to learn a language in the way that everyone does, adjusting to the general rhythm, with which not everyone succeeds. The possible solution to it may be an individual approach to teaching, and it may be far more effective for the learners. It is also important to select a certain teacher that you like, otherwise the learning process may suffer because of psychological things.

One more problem is related to the size of the group. The larger the group is, the less chance the person has to answer in class and to take part in the communication. Therefore, when doing homework and preparing for a lesson, not all students may do their best because they are well aware that it is possible to cheat or not to answer during the lesson, and eventually they will not succeed in learning and will not achieve their desire to speak a foreign language, eventually blaming a teacher for it.

The big size of the group also results in the teacher's inability to thoroughly test the knowledge of everyone. The material given to the group is the same, but not everyone learns it in the same way. Therefore, when someone does not understand something, there is often no way to find it out and to correct it because the group has to move on with the programme.

To sum up, there should be a special approach to effectively learn a language in a big group. First of all, it must be ensured that there is a good atmosphere in the group so that the conflicts do not occur, and if there are any, the teacher should resolve them immediately. If conflict is inevitable and one of the students cannot behave properly, it is worth taking additional measures by talking to their parents or applying some kind of punishment. During the lesson the same students should not answer all the time, thus going ahead of the rest and depriving the others of the opportunity to practice. Everyone should feel equally comfortable in the classroom. There should be equality in the group.

The teacher should assess the students' abilities and understand what changes to the programme are worth making, if necessary. The students who lag behind the rest should be given additional tasks, or completely different homework with the material they need more practice in. If students are distracted from the process of learning and talk a lot, it is better to make them change their seats.

Any phenomenon has both advantages and disadvantages. It all depends on the attitude of the parties. The same situation is in the case of

studying of a foreign language in big groups: it all depends on the attitude of both parties – both the teacher and the students. The teacher should not ignore the problems in the learning process, and students, in their turn, should be interested in the process and do their best in the subject.

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